

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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P R 302040Z JUN 78

FM AMEMBASSY QUITO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8667

INFO AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 QUITO 4489

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, EC

SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: AROUND THE FAR TURN

REF: QUITO 3711

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: RAUL CLEMENTE HUERTA AND HAIME ROLDOS NOW SEEM TO BE CONTENDING CLOSELY FOR A RUN-OFF BERTH AGAINST ACKNOWLEDGED LEADER SIXTO DURAN-BALLEN IN THE JULY 16 ELECTIONS. HUERTA HAS PARLAYED VAST SUMS OF MONEY, MEDIA PUBLICITY, AND LARGE CROWDS INTO A STRONG POSITION IN THE LAST MONTH. ROLDOS' CAMPAIGN FINALLY APPEARS TO HAVE GOTTEN OFF THE GROUND AS MIDDLE-CLASS RESISTANCE TOWARD HIS CANDIDACY HAS ERODED IN THE FACE OF HIS INCREASING INDEPENDENCE FROM BUCARAM. DURAN IS STILL THE LEADER, HOWEVER, DESPITE SOME SLUMP IN HIS STANDING IN POLLS IN QUITO AND GUAYAQUIL. RODRIGO BORJA LEADS IN QUITO, BUT NOWHERE ELSE. END SUMMARY.

2. WITH LESS THAN THREE WEEKS TO GO BEFORE THE JULY 16 ELECTIONS, IT APPEARS THAT RAUL CLEMENTE HUERTA RENDON OF THE LIBERAL PARTY-BASED COALITION AND JAIME ROLDOS OF THE CONCENTRATION OF POPULAR FORCES WILL BE VYING FOR SECOND
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PLACE BEHIND FRONTRUNNER SIXTO DURAN-BALLEN AND A SUB-SEQUENT RUN-OFF AGAINST DURAN-BALLEN IN THE SECOND ROUND.

3. HUERTA HAS BEEN ABLE TO MOUNT THE MOST IMPRESSIVE CAMPAIGN OF ALL THE CANDIDATES IN THE PAST MONTH. STARTING LATE AND UNDER THE CLOUD OF HIS COLLUSION WITH THE MILITARY

AND GUAYAQUIL BUSINESS INTERESTS IN SUBSTITUTING HIS OWN CANDIDACY FOR THAT OF HIS NEPHEW PANCHO HUERTO MONTALVO, HUERTA SEEMS TO HAVE MADE UP A LOT OF GROUND. POLLS WHICH HAD SHOWN HIM LAGGING BADLY IN QUITO AND GUAYAQUIL IN THE MIDDLE OF MAY, NOW INDICATE THAT HE WILL DRAW A RESPECTABLE AMOUNT OF VOTES IN BOTH PLACES. HIS GAINS HAVE BEEN ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE SUCCESS OF HIS STRATEGY WHICH PROJECTED A MEDIA BLITZ AND THE ATTRACTION OF LARGE CROWDS TO HIS STUMP APPEARANCES IN ORDER TO CREATE A BANDWAGON PSYCHOLOGY. HE HAS BEEN ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH THIS THROUGH HIS ACCESS TO THE MOST AMPLE CAMPAIGN FINANCING IN ECUADOR'S HISTORY, ALLOWING HIM TO BUY ENORMOUS AMOUNTS OF TIME AND SPACE IN THE MEDIA AND TO BUS IN THOUSANDS OF ADHERENTS TO HIS RALLIES.

4. AFTER FAILING TO ACHIEVE THE PRESIDENCY TWICE BEFORE, HUERTA'S BID THIS TIME IS NOT WITHOUT ITS NOTE OF DESPERATION. DESPITE A DIABETIC CONDITION AND REPORTEDLY GREAT FEAR OF THE EFFECT OF ALTITUDE CHANGES ON HIS HEALTH, HUERTA EARLY ABANDONED PLANS TO SCHEDULE ONLY FOUR OR FIVE MAJOR CONCENTRATIONS IN THE LARGEST CITIES IN FAVOR OF EXTENSIVE CAMPAIGNING IN MOTOR CARAVANS THROUGHOUT EVERY TOWN AND HAMLET IN THE SIERRA AND ON THE COAST. HIS RHETORIC, WHICH REPORTEDLY HAD SOMETHING OF A STEVENSONIAN FLAVOR IN HIS 1956 CAMPAIGN EFFORT, HAS DEGENERATED INTO "PROMISE THEM EVERYTHING" DEMAGOGUERY. CONFIDENTIAL

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IT IS BEING SAID THAT HUERTA HAD BECOME SO ACCUSTOM TO PROMISING A BRIDGE TO EVERY TOWN HE VISITS, THAT WHEN HE INADVERTENTLY GUARANTEED ONE FOR A VILLAGE THAT DID NOT NEED IT, HE ALSO HAD TO PROMISE A RIVER TO GO WITH IT. HUERTA'S AMBITIONS ALSO SHOW THROUGH IN THE IMPOSSIBLY DISPARATE COALITION THAT HE HAS PUT TOGETHER. NOT ONLY HAVE OLD RIGHT-WING PONCISTAS AND FOLLOWERS OF ECCENTRIC LEFT-LEANING CARLOS JULIO AROSEMENA BEEN INCLUDED FROM THE BEGINNING, BUT LATELY SUPPORT FROM JOSE CHAVEZ' CEOSL LABOR UNION HAS BROUGHT IN SEVERAL RATHER OUTRE GROUPS, SOME OF WHOM ARE INVADING THE LAND OF OTHERS PLEDGED TO HUERTA. THE ULTIMATE INCONSISTENCY OF HUERTA'S ATTEMPT TO CAST A CENTER-RIGHT IMAGE HAS BEEN THE RECENT RECRUITMENT OF GUAYAQUIL INDUSTRIALIST LEON FEBRES-CORDERO AS HIS CAMPAIGN TREASURER ON THE COAST. SOURCES CLOSE TO HUERTA SAY THAT FEBRES-CORDERO, WHO WAS BEING PUSHED STRONGLY BY THE COASTAL OLIGARCHY A FEW MONTHS AGO AS SIXTO DURAN'S RUNNING MATE, HAS BEEN PROMISED TO HEAD THE LIBERAL LIST FOR CONGRESS FROM GUAYAS NEXT YEAR.

5. ALTHOUGH EVERYTHING HAD BEEN GOING HUERTA'S WAY FOR THE PAST MONTH, THERE ARE RECENT SIGNS THAT HIS CAMPAIGN

MAY BE PLATEAUING. HIS SATURATION OF TELEVISION MAY BE APPROACHING THE POINT OF DIMINISHING RETURNS AS MORE AND MORE VOTORS COMPLAIN ABOUT HIS STRIDENCY AND OLD-FASHIONED MANNERISMS ON THE HOT MEDIUM. HE SEEMED TO ESCAPE PRETTY WELL FROM THE FIRST BRUSH WITH PUBLIC REVELATION THAT HIS RUNNING MATE, ARSENIO VIVANCO, HAD BEEN FOUND GUILTY OF CUSTOMS FRAUD SEVERAL YEARS AGO, BUT QUESTIONS ABOUT HUERTA'S HEALTH HAVE ALSO RAISED EMBARRASSING QUESTIONS ABOUT HIS PUTATIVE SUCCESSOR IN OFFICE IN CASE HUERTA SUCCUMBS. ALSO, WHILE THE CFP AND DEMOCRATIC LEFT HAVE CONCENTRATED THEIR GUNS ON DURAN-BALLEN UP UNTIL NOW IN THE HOPE THAT IF EITHER ROLDOS OR BORJA ARE IN THE RUN-OFF THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO REACH AN UNDERSTANDING WITH THE REMAINING SO-CALLED CENTER-LEFT

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PARTIES, HUERTA'S CURRENT STRENGTH VIEWED AGAINST HIS POTENTIAL VULNERABILITIES -- ESPECIALLY HIS ASSOCIATION WITH FEBREA-CORDERO -- MAY BE TOO COMPELLING TO RESIST. HUERTA'S FORTUNES COULD CHANGE DRASTICALLY IN THE LAST 17 DAYS IF HIS RIVALS CHANGE THEIR TACTICS.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 QUITO 4489

6. JAIME ROLDOS, WHO STARTED SLOWLY AND SEEMED UNABLE TO GET HIS CAMPAIGN OFF THE GROUND ONLY TWO WEEKS AGO, APPEARS

TO HAVE SPURTED RECENTLY INTO A CONTENDING POSITION. IN THE MOST SERIOUS OPINION POLLS AVAILABLE, ROLDOS HAD BEEN SEEN DURING MAY AS ONLY EVEN WITH HUERTA AND DURAN-BALLEN IN THE CFP GUAYAQUIL STRONGHOLD AND UNABLE TO PUSH CLEARLY ABOVE NON-CONTENDERS ABDON CALDERON AND COMMUNIST RENE MAUGE IN QUITO. HOWEVER, IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS HE HAS ASSUMED A COMMANDING LEAD IN THE SAME POLL IN GUAYAQUIL AND IS BREATHING DOWN THE NECK OF HUERTA FOR THIRD PLACE IN QUITO BEHIND DURAN AND BORJA. POLITICAL PROS HAVE GIVEN ROLDOS THE HIGHEST MARKS FOR HIS DISCIPLINE IN THE FACE OF A SERIES OF ROADBLOCKS WHICH HAVE BEEN PUT IN HIS WAY BY THE GOVERNMENT BECAUSE OF HIS ASSOCIATION WITH BUCARAM. ROLDOS HAS BEEN CONSISTENT AND UNFLAPPABLE IN HANDLING THE MOST DIFFICULT QUESTIONS IN MEDIA INTERVIEWS, GAINING PLAUDITS FOR HIS MATURITY DESPITE THE FACT THAT HE IS THE YOUNGEST CANDIDATE IN THE RACE. PERHAPS MOST SIGNIFICANTLY, ROLDOS, ACCORDING TO THE POLLS, HAS MADE A BREAKTHROUGH IN OVERCOMING MIDDLE-CLASS AND FEMALE VOTERS RESISTANCE TO HIS CANDIDACY. THE FORMER OWED OBVIOUSLY TO CLASS FEAR OF BUCARAM AND THE LATTER, WE SUSPECT, WAS DUE TO THE CONFIDENTIAL

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DISTAFF DESIRE FOR A MORE MATURE FIGURE (THE AVUNCULAR DURAN-BALLEN CONTINUES TO HAVE THE GREATEST SUPPORT AMONG WOMEN VOTERS).

7. WITH A LOT LESS MONEY TO SPEND ON BUSING, ROLDOS AND RUNNING-MATE OSVALDO HURTADO CONTINUE TO DRAW HEALTHY CROWDS TO THEIR RALLIES, ALTHOUGH THEY ARE NOT IN THE HUERTA AND DURAN CATEGORY IN THIS COMPETITION. ROLDOS' MAIN CONCERN IS HOW TO PUT TOGETHER ENOUGH VOTES IN THE SIERRA TO GO WITH HIS COASTAL STRENGTH. IN THIS REGARD, BUCARAM RECENTLY COMPLAINED TO EMBOFFS THAT THE POPULAR DEMOCRACY-CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PART OF THE COALITION WAS NOT PULLING ITS WEIGHT IN THE HIGHLANDS. ROLDOS PLANS TO PUT ON A MAJOR EFFORT IN QUITO BEGINNING THIS WEEKEND, AND MUCH OF HIS SUCCESS IN EDGING OUT HUERTA WILL DEPEND ON HOW WELL THE ASSIDUOUSLY INDIFFERENT QUITENOS RESPOND.

8. MUCH OF ROLDOS' RECENT GAINS ARE ACCOUNTED FOR BY HIS EXPERT HANDLING OF HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH BUCARAM. ALTHOUGH BUCARAM STILL COMMANDS THE CFP ORGANIZATION AND REMAINS THE CHARISMATIC LEADER, ROLDOS, AFTER IDENTIFYING HIMSELF CLOSELY WITH HIS MENTOR IN THE EARLY STAGES, GIVES EVERY EVIDENCE THAT HE IS LEAVING THE NEST. ONE EXAMPLE IS THE ABSENCE OF BUCARAM'S NAME AND IMAGE ON ROLDOS' NEW CAMPAIGN POSTERS. ANOTHER ARE RUMORS OF A ROLDOS-BUCARAM QUARREL. OBSERVING THE TWO TOGETHER AT A RECENT LUNCH IN GUAYAQUIL, EMBOFFS WERE IMPRESSED WITH THE SEA-CHANGE IN THE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP, WHEREIN ROLDOS HAS MOVED

FROM AN ENTIRELY DEFERENTIAL ATTITUDE IN BUCARAM'S PRESENCE ONLY SIX MONTHS AGO TO A CLEARLY EQUAL AND INDEPENDENT POSITION. THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN IMPRESSED WITH ROLDOS' PERSONA BUT WHO HAVE FEARED BUCARAM SEEM TO BE NOTICING SLOWLY AND RESPONDING. THE GOE'S
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PATENT ANTIPATHY TO THE CFP ALSO MAY BE BEGINNING TO HELP ROLDOS.

9. RODRIGO BORJA'S CAMPAIGN, MEANWHILE, SEEMS TO HAVE PEAKED OUT IN THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS. A FEW ABRASIVE TELEVISION APPEARANCES AND AN UNCERTAIN MANNER ON THE HUSTINGS MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO HIS PROBLEMS. IT ALSO SEEMS CLEAR THAT HUERTA'S PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN HAS EATEN INTO MUCH OF BORJA'S SUPPORT FROM OLDER LIBERALS. BORJA'S GREATEST SINGLE PROBLEM HAS BEEN HIS INABILITY TO GAIN SIGNIFICANT VOTER APPROVAL IN GUAYAQUIL, WHERE HE IS RUNNING NECK AND NECK WITH MAUGE FOR LAST PLACE. AT THE MOMENT, HE IS MAKING A LAST, DETERMINED EFFORT IN GUAYAS WHERE DEMOCRATIC LEFT LEADERS SAY HE MUST WIN AT LEAST 15 PERCENT OF THE VOTE TO HAVE A CHANCE NATIONALLY. BORJA CONTINUES TO LEAD DURAN BY A RESPECTABLE MARGIN IN QUITO ACCORDING TO THE LATEST SOUNDINGS, HOWEVER.

10. DURAN-BALLEN CONTINUES TO BE THE OVERALL LEADER ALTHOUGH, ACCORDING TO POLLS, HE HAS SLIPPED SOMEWHAT IN BOTH QUITO AND GUAYAQUIL. HOWEVER, HE IS THE ONLY CANDIDATE WHO IS SUPPORTED BY MORE THAN 20 PERCENT OF THOSE QUESTIONED IN BOTH CITIES, WHICH ACCOUNT FOR ABOUT 40 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE. HUERTA'S CAMPAIGNING HAS DISLODGED DURAN FROM HIS PARAMOUNT POSITION IN THE MEDIA AND MAY BE HURTING HIM marginally. THE QUESTION OF HIS BIRTH IN THE US HAS STILL NOT BEEN LAID TO REST AND MAY HAVE AN INFLUENCE ON THE FINAL RESULTS. THE DURAN CAMP CONTINUES TO EXUDE ENTHUSIASM AND OPTIMISM, HALF-BELIEVING AND HALF-HOPING THAT HE WILL OBTAIN AROUND 40 PERCENT OF THE VOTE WHICH WOULD JUST ABOUT ASSURE HIS VICTORY IN THE SECOND ROUND WHATEVER LAST MINUTE COALITION IS THROWN AGAINST HIM. MUCH OF THEIR OPTIMISM IS BASED ON THEIR PERCEPTION THAT DURAN HAS BEEN ABLE TO ESCAPE THE SECTARIAN CONSERVATIVE BASE OF HIS CANDIDACY AND IS VIEWED AS A PRAGMATIC AND MODERN EXECUTIVE. THEY POINT TO DURAN'S
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GOOD SHOWING IN POLLS AMONG THE LOWER URBAN CLASSES AS

PROOF OF THEIR ASSUMPTION. THE CANDIDATE IS EMPHASIZING HIS APPEAL TO THE LOWER URBAN CLASSES IN BOTH HIS PUBLICITY AND IN HIS PROGRAMS FOR URBAN REDEVELOPMENT. HOWEVER, HIS CONTINUED POLITICAL AMATEURISHNESS, WHILE REFRESHING, HAS ALIENATED SEVERAL IMPORTANT PROVINCIAL BOSSES AND MAY COST HIM DEARLY IN MANABI AND EL ORO WHERE HUERTA AND ROLDOS ARE ALSO STRONG.

11. CONCLUSION. THE ORDINARY WISDOM IS THAT DURAN WILL FINISH FIRST AND HUERTA OR ROLDOS SECOND, BARRING A SURPRISE BY BORJA. IF THAT OCCURS, HUERTA AND ROLDOS WILL DO COMPARATIVELY BETTER THAN DURAN ON THE SECOND BALLOT. IF DURAN POLLS AROUND 40 PERCENT ON THE FIRST BALLOT HE WILL PROBABLY BE HOME FREE. CONVERSELY, IF HE DRAWS ONLY 30 PERCENT, AS NOW VIEWED, HE WILL PROBABLY BE DEFEATED ON THE SECOND ROUND.
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